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**MAJOR
KRISTA DUNLOP**

**International Seminar:
The Role of Women as Actors
in the Armed Forces of North America**

It is an honor to participate in this seminar as a representative of the Canadian Armed Forces. I am an artillery officer in Canada. It is my pleasure to talk about my Army, which has evolved because of the tremendous efforts of Canadian women like Rear-admiral Bennett, Nancy Perron who develops policy on our behalf, and Susan Prescott, my other delegation colleague. It's only because of their hard work and effort that, for me, my army is a place where I am able to be comfortable and proud to serve.

I have been enjoying my service in the artillery for 16 years now, and it seems like just yesterday that I joined. It is an absolute honor to serve my country at home and abroad, and, hopefully I will inspire future men and women to serve their nation with pride.

I think for me this quotation by Ruth Ginsberg, the second female US Supreme Court justice, is absolutely fitting for those of us in the combat arms.¹ Because there are only 4 percent of us that are in the combat arms at the present, for many of us being a second is not currently the situation. We are constantly living as firsts in a land that has been traditionally male-dominated. And so this will be an anchor for my testimony.

So, a quick introduction about myself. Again, I've been in the artillery for 16 years now, and I've served 14 of those in field units. I am mother to a 9-year-old son and an 11-year-old stepdaughter, who keep me grounded and very busy outside the office. I served in Afghanistan for 8 months, spending at least five days a week outside the wires and outside the camps working with Afghan operational units; as well as training institutions and military members and governmental leadership. Upon my return I immediately received command of an artillery unit ranging from 95 to 165 soldiers for a period of two years. As a battery commander, I planned and executed Canada's largest live surface-to-air missile range and deployed unmanned aerial vehicles to Afghanistan and ground

¹ The Canadian Armed Forces website defines "combat arms" as "a collective term used to describe the four combat-focused occupations within the Canadian Army: armour, artillery, infantry and engineer." <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/hie8w7rm>. [Editor's Note.]

troops in support of our navy. Then my battery went through high-level training in preparation for deployment. This command was the most rewarding part of my experience to date. I continue to do what I do because I love the challenges of being in command, the physicality of the job, and the fact that every day is different. I want to be an inspiration to my son and stepdaughter, not only as a woman in the combat arms, but as a woman who loves what she does each and every day.

While Canada is a world leader in the integration of women into all aspects of our military, women continue to be agents of change even today; less as pioneers, as Rear-admiral Bennett has experienced, and more as the torchbearers of those who came before us. We continue to achieve many firsts, which I'll speak to shortly, having been accepted into what women call the last bastion of the old boys' club. Speaking from my experience, I chose the combat arms because I wanted a challenge, relished the field of command, and couldn't wait to travel the world with my soldiers. The physical, mental, and leadership demands are not for everyone, male or female, but it was this very thing that appealed to me.

Canada has many talented women in its military, both officers and non-commissioned members, who have proven themselves both capable and poised on missions at home and abroad, including combat operations in Afghanistan. Although women within

the combat arms only comprise 4 percent of those serving, women members are on the rise. We have women serving in the infantry, the artillery, combat engineers, special forces, and on submarines. In Afghanistan, we had 83 infantry, 53 artillery, and 34 combat engineers who deployed as women.

Key to our efforts to integrate women in every military occupation in Canada, is that there is only one standard. This means that only the best, male or female, make it through. My experience has been that the qualities of leadership and team building equally apply to both men and women. As long as you protect qualification standards and make sure no one is given a free ride—though not without speed bumps—things will be much less dramatic than people envision. We focus on capability, skill, discipline, command presence, and the ability to be innovative on the front lines. And while it is rarely talked about, there are many men that do not possess the traits to the level required to be successful in the combat arms. I see myself not as a “female” in the combat arms, but as one of many majors in the artillery, and, like my colleagues, think that I have not done anything to exceed what was expected of me as an officer at any rank or level. If you ask me how many female soldiers I commanded as a battery commander, I honestly couldn’t give you an answer; but I could tell you that I commanded upwards of 165 talented, hardworking, fit, and extremely determined soldiers. For me as a field com-

mander, gender was irrelevant. I had soldiers, male and female, who sometimes failed to meet my pretty high expectations. We took corrective action, and we moved forward as a team.

There are many misconceptions when it comes to women in the combat arms, including doubts about the physical power required. However, today you can see that is generally not the case. Women “threaten cohesion” and the classic “the front lines are not for women” are examples. However, we have a couple of important Canadian examples that strike these misconceptions out. Captain Nicola Goddard, a friend and fellow artillery officer, was an exceptional leader. She was dynamic, energetic, and willing to go the extra mile to train and take care of her subordinates. When she first arrived in Afghanistan as a forward observation officer, Afghan elders commented on her strength and determination as she carried loads equal to and larger than her soldiers to support a mission. On May 17, 2006, she became the first Canadian women killed in combat operations in Afghanistan as she called in artillery fire in support of light infantry. She was truly an inspiration to me. Next, Eleanor Taylor, a friend and colleague of mine, served a tour of duty as Canada’s first infantry commander in Afghanistan 2010, distinguishing herself as a capable, talented, and truly formidable leader. In a newspaper interview, Commander Taylor spoke to the incredible courage of her soldiers under fire, the pride she took in their achievements,

and her excitement about returning home to her husband and starting a family. She was recently named one of Canada's top 100 most powerful women.

As with anyone serving within the combat arms, we are expected to do our jobs, and to do them well. We are expected, just like our male counterparts, to be decisive, issue directions clearly, make rapid adjustments in response to a very dynamic battlefield, and inspire from the front. We are extremely lucky that Canadian society is supportive of women in non-traditional roles such as serving in the combat arms. As girls and young women, we are raised with the expectation that we can do whatever we want as long as we earn it. Women in the combat arms is normalizing, relatively speaking. For many soldiers today, their mothers, their sisters, and their friends are executives, chief executive officers, engineers, police officers, and firefighters. They set the example for their sons as they move through the military.

This is not to say that there are no critics who question the ethics of women in combat roles, or that the Canadian experience has not been a challenging one. However, Canadian society has evolved to teach equality of opportunity from a very early age. In terms of challenges, I think a few come up. Recruiting will continue to be a challenge, not only for women. Military service is not distinguished as a highly regarded profession, making it less attractive to both men and women equally. As has always been the case, we

must continue to work to ensure quotas are never implemented and merit is always the driving force for promotions and senior appointments.

One of the recurring challenges to those of us in the combat arms today is how many firsts are yet to come, such as first female regimental battalion commanders, brigade commanders, and Canadian army commanders. This translates into tremendous pressure for those of us who were facing those firsts. The spotlight is shining on us as the leadership waits to see if we will rise to the occasion or falter. I will never forget going from an assembly point to my tac [tactical] position,² where a team of combat leaders were. I knew that a number of senior officials had come to the field to observe the single woman, among 29 male colleagues, lead more than 400 soldiers on a very successful attack after a lengthy advanced contact. It was definitely a stressful moment, but it was a moment of pride and one that I will take to the grave.

Finally, and probably the most difficult for me, is finding equilibrium in our work/life balance. This will continue to evade many of us. Multiple deployments, training and working long hours away from home, as well as the expectation that we are available and willing always to put service before self and family, continue to put strain on our families.

² “Tac position” is the place in the theater or battlefield where tactics on the use of weapons and troops are implemented.

In my experience over 16 years, I think there are a couple of points that are critical. A single standard, physically and academically, and in training and operations is critical to success. Gateways cannot be bypassed to increase female integration in the military. Accelerated promotions and appointments to senior positions fail to address the requirements of credibility and trust. To make the right decisions at higher ranks, you need a solid foundation of experience, testing in the field, and the exercise of fundamentals at every level. Women do not need to be men to achieve success in the military. Women need to be true to themselves to find their own leadership. I don't feel the need to cut my hair short, or chew tobacco, or not wear pink to be a better leader. I need to give clear directions, assume risk, make tough decisions, lead from the front, and just be myself.

In closing, as women strive to reach equality with men and parity in employment, the military has consistently been opening its doors. Most men consider it inappropriate for women to be placed in danger. This instinct may have some deep psychological roots. However, women have aptly proven their courage and ability under the harshest of combat conditions; my friends Captain Goddard and Major Taylor are just two that come to mind. But what I think distinguishes female combat officers is their desire to be recognized for their leadership, their vision, and their love of their job, rather than for being a woman in a man's

role. Equality in the combat arms is only an achievement if you allow it to be. Whether you are a man or a woman, you must command with enthusiasm; lead from the front; make decisions with commitment; embody the warrior spirit; and thrive on everything critical to success. Equality among colleagues and credibility is everyone's to lose in the combat arms, regardless of gender.

Thank you so much for inviting me to participate. It has been an absolute honor.

